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ABSTRACT

The paper describes mainstreaming of behaviorally disordered students at Orange Elementary School (in Waterloo, IA). The author, who is principal of the school, makes a number of suggestions for the implementation of mainstreaming, such as being aware of the structural capabilities of the individual school building (a school with many steps, for example, would not easily accommodate physically handicapped children), planning the scheduling of the handicapped children so that they can easily attend mainstreamed classes, and selecting staff (whenever possible) whose attitudes toward the handicapped and working with them are positive. Other suggestions include inservice education and reduction in regular class size (to assist teachers in coping with the extra time involved in mainstream programming). The author explains that mainstreaming should not be attempted all at once; taking time to know each child is important. Enlargement of budgets, student attitudes, and consistent discipline are also explored. Compliance with the law in matters such as securing the proper tests and evaluations, and obtaining signatures from parents and the implications of mainstreaming in negotiations with teachers are reviewed. (PHR)

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Considerations in the Integration of Behaviorally Disordered Students into the Regular Classroom:

Implications for the School Principal

A Presentation at the 57th Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Dallas, Texas

April 27, 1979

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As some of you may have seen, one television program of "60 Minutes" that aired in January of this year told of a Michigan school teacher who was called at home one evening by a fellow teacher and told to accept three handicapped students into her classroom the next day... Another teacher on the same program said, "With thirty youngsters, I can't take a handicapped student who is going to require a majority of my time." ... One couple wanted their child mainstreamed... Another couple definitely did not...

I thought "Ye Gads! What are they doing in Michigan?" But after thinking about it, I realized these circumstances could have occurred anywhere and probably similar ones do. Hopefully, school personnel in all buildings are continually striving to improve their organization so that less than desirable situations such as these don't arise.

The key figure in building planning and the implementation of mainstreaming is the school principal. The person in this position should provide the needed administrative support to ensure the success of building programs.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about Orange Elementary School in Waterloo, Iowa, since that is where I've gained the majority of my background. Unfortunately, in our State, administrators don't receive extensive training regarding successful techniques for mainstreaming. We have had inservice regarding the law, but little beyond that.

Before I begin, I want to caution you. Since all schools are unique and faculties and students are not alike, do not

copy for your school what may sound good or may be successful in our school. One fallacy I feel worth noting is that by visiting other schools and learning about model programs, you can implement that exact same program in your own school. You can't. The plans you develop should fit your school, your staff, and your student body. Here I am not telling you not to listen to me, but rather that ideas need to be adapted to meet specific needs. I'll mention a few things that have been successful for us and maybe you'll gain a fresh idea that can be adapted to your situation. I've always felt if you can gain one new idea or learn something new each day that helps you, then that day was worthwhile.

Know your Structural Capabilities

Orange Elementary School is a fairly traditional school located in a rural portion of Waterloo, a city of approximately 80,000 people. Our building is rather chopped up structurally, with lots of steps. As a result, without significant additional costs, our building could never house physically handicapped students. Classes are basically self-contained and fairly structured. I would also suggest not placing an ED program in an open spaces school where children in regular classes are more free to move around. They need structure--and lots of changes can be devastating. At one time, Orange contained K-12 students, so the facilities available to us are excellent. We have a full-sized gym, stage, a science room and lab tables, two music rooms, an art room, cafeteria, football field, and track. Orange could house approximately 550 students, but with only 360 currently in

attendance, we have lots of room for expansion. In fact, we utilize every little space available to us.

Special Programs in Our Building

Less than 50 of our students walk to school, so busing is not new to our attendance area. This actually is an important factor since all children in special programs probably don't live in your attendance area. Since the majority of students at Orange do ride buses there is no stigma or additional separation for those students in special classes because of riding buses.

When I became principal at Orange five years ago, we had three Special Classes with integration (SCI) classes of mentally disabled students, one SCI class of emotionally disabled, and one part-time learning disabled resource room. Since then we have added a full-time multicategorical resource room as well as two SCI classes of learning disabled students, which we asked to have placed in our building. Yearly, I have had to tell to our superintendent that, "Yes! We do want to keep our special programs," and "No! Multitudes of problems have not occurred as a result of having them." Currently, one out of every six students at Orange is in a special program.

You may be asking yourself, "Why does she want special programs in her building and why does she even ask for more?" I guess it's because we've had some success with these programs and we have some valid reasons for continuing to attempt achievement of that success. One reason for maintaining these programs is that we like being able to serve our own attendance area students. Much of the time if they have been identified for a special

program they don't have to go to a different school.

Planning Time and Scheduling

One of the first problems we attempted to deal with five years ago was how to get some special class students involved with students in regular classes. Oh, it's easy to bring students together in the lunchroom or on the playground, but what we discovered in areas such as art, P.E., music and library (which was where we started) was that regular classes and special classes together got too big. Classes were ending up with up to 40 students together at one time, too large for teachers to successfully manage. As a result, we also ended up with special class students who could not manage the mainstream. Then we thought about just mainstreaming those special class students who are capable of working with regular class students. Seems good on the surface--but, of course, this led to another problem. No planning time for special class teachers. We were finally able to settle the immediate problem. With the approval of our superintendent, we were allowed to dismiss school one-half hour early each day for special class students, so mainstreaming could occur when and where appropriate and each teacher would receive one-half hour of planning time per day which is comparable to the other teachers in our building.

When making up schedules for a building, principals should be sure to schedule special classes just as they do regular classes. It allows for more flexibility. Mainstreaming does not become a must for all students whether they can handle it or not. We now have a 2-section building (two 1st grades, two 2nd grades, etc.)

Comparing now and when we had some combination rooms, we find the scheduling of mainstreaming much easier. If one section doesn't work, another probably will.

So we settled our immediate problem. Mainstreaming could occur only when and where appropriate and planning time was secured for special class teachers. But as any building administrator should know, long range goals should be set. Before that can ever happen, however, everyone in the building needs to become aware of what problems exist and a caring attitude to solve those problems needs to be present.

Hiring and Necessary Attitudes

Unfortunately, when I first came to Orange I could not pick my staff, but fortunately they were better than I probably could have picked myself. We have been lucky not to have many negative staff attitudes. Although we have a teacher or two that are not particularly receptive or adept at working with handicapped students on a daily basis, we're able to work around them. My advice is not to force mainstreaming in your building. Adult attitudes are often the most difficult to change. Our staff cohesiveness and support for special programs has been excellent, so this is not a problem area that we've really had to overcome. (I could attribute our success to my pleasing personality, but I won't.) Many school principals may find staff attitudes a significant problem. If they continue to persist, in all probability it may be the administrator's fault. The mainstreaming process will not succeed without total administrative backing and support. Inter-staff communications must also be good.

Administrators must have trust from their staffs and vice versa. An open door policy is an absolute must.

When hiring new people now, I always mention the large number of special programs we have in our building and I always try to feel out their attitudes and experiences, if any, regarding mainstreaming.

Inservice and Planning

To insure that everyone is "talking the same language," everyone needs to be cognizant of the characteristics of mildly handicapped students. Discuss P.L. 94-142, show filmstrips, have discussions with coordinators, consultants, psychologists, etc. Because participatory planning is extremely important, everyone that is to be involved one way or another in the mainstreaming process, needs the opportunity to be a part of the planning. One concept you might like to remember is, "Don't have a big thing flop, have a small thing grow." Go slowly and easily. Don't cram any aspect of mainstreaming down someone's throat.

Gerald Nadler, utilizing the systems approach to planning, has come up with an excellent method called the IDEALS Concept. People involved in planning should come from all levels in an organization. They should meet and narrow down possibilities to one specific low level purpose on problems which can be agreed upon by everyone. Brainstorming may not be the best to ultimately arrive at this purpose. The Cuplet method can be used for agreement. The IDEAL solutions are discussed and then finally a feasible solution is arrived at. This method actually works in

reverse from some planning you're probably familiar with. Because you work from the top down rather than the bottom up, you tend not to be constrained by what is currently occurring.

Released time for inservice or planning in your district is probably as hard to secure in yours as it is in ours, but don't let that defeat you. We've all had professional leaves turned down or workshop requests turned down, but other options exist. Utilize small sections of time during the day. There are several books, guides, etc., that can help you with planning.

Regular Class Size

Another goal we worked on which took us several years to achieve was reducing regular class sizes so we could improve upon our mainstreaming. This past year we finally achieved our request for an additional teacher. The big and unsuspected result from this has been regular classroom teachers have been much more receptive for assisting with mainstreaming. As compared to the district average of about 25 per classroom, our building average is about 22. This is smaller than any other school in Waterloo and the teachers know it and like it.

Go Slowly With Mainstreaming

As I said before, let a small thing grow--go slowly with mainstreaming. Reintegrate only those students who are capable and choose the areas where the least amount of pressure will exist for both students and teachers. If there is a 50-50 chance the student will fail in the mainstreaming process, don't do it until the odds are better. ED students will have to be much more carefully watched because of their emotional or social

handicaps. Don't assume that just because a child is in an SCI room, that mainstreaming must occur immediately or in the near future. Students should be achieving almost total success in their own special class setting first.

Know Each Child Personally

Each principal should know each child in a special program personally, so that frequent conferences and discussions about the child's progress can occur. The principal should also be making contributions during discussions. Contemplated mainstreaming needs to be discussed by the special teacher and principal so that the most appropriate learning environment can be secured for the child. Don't select a teacher who already has management problems.

Since students in special programs are likely to have come from other attendance areas, the principal and teachers should try to develop school pride and spirit in them as soon as possible. School-wide involvement of all students in activities should be strived for. Don't limit fun building activities to just those students in regular classes.

Parent involvement is also very important, but we find often this is difficult to achieve.

Curriculum Considerations

Be careful that during the reintegration process that reading and math series, etc., are not changed. It's important to continue the curriculum as much the same as possible.

If a child is in an ED program or similar program where sooner or later he/she may return to their home school, it is important to use the same materials as that of the home school.

Be Prepared to Expand Budgets

This may mean buying additional materials such as masters, workbooks, tests, which are different than the ones normally secured by the building.

As principals dealing with school budgets, allow a little extra - even above the special education monies you receive.

Student Attitudes Regarding Handicapped Students

Administrators and teachers are both responsible for the attitudes of regular class students toward handicapped students. There are filmstrips, films and books available for use that can be utilized with children to discuss handicaps and differences. Don't let double standards develop. Try to treat all children fairly and equally. Adult attitudes can be very damaging when trying to develop good student attitudes. Don't refer to that "Emotionally disabled child" or "Johnny is mentally retarded, so you be good to him," in front of students or lay people.

Consistent Discipline Is Important

The principal needs to keep very close ties with teachers and students in their building. Regarding ED students, it is extremely important for the principal to be aware of what the ED teacher is doing to correct the behavior disorders; a principal can tear down what is carefully being developed in the classroom. The principal should definitely use the same management techniques as the ED teacher when dealing with the ED child.

Complying With the Law

The building principal should always be certain the law is being complied with at all points along the line such as the

referrals, necessary signatures, testings, staffings, and parent involvement. When mainstreaming is initiated, parents should be notified and possibly a conference might be requested. It's always a good idea to notify the home school if it's apparent that a child may be making good progress and possibly returning to the home school in the not too distant future. The person coordinating the program might want to do that so no bomb shells are dropped. When it becomes time for a complete change of program this also requires a staffing and parent signature. Principals should have as much involvement in staffings and conferences as possible.

Implications for Negotiations

Thus far in our district, teachers have not made much headway regarding mainstreaming in teacher negotiations. But in the not too distant future, I foresee extra pay may be set aside for those teachers receiving special education students into their regular classroom. Other possibilities are additional salary for additional students above the average number, and specific and special training being required as a part of certification for regular class teachers.

Our building mainstreaming committee is still hard at work this year assessing teacher needs and pulling in resource people to discuss management techniques, etc.

I'm still working also with our central office attempting to maintain our small class sizes, so you never reach all of your goals.

Conclusions

What ever happens if mainstreaming is to be more than an administrative arrangement, it must be fully and morally supported by the principal. This should be obvious to the faculty and central office personnel. It is the principal's responsibility to gain district support of building programs. If goals are to be realized, funds and time are often prerequisites.

Everyone needs to be well aware of the potential complications inherent in mainstreaming and support must be given to those people directly involved.

Remember - "Go Slowly and Make a Small Thing Grow."